

10 July 1956

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: Proposal to Transfer Certain BGN Responsibilities  
and Staff Functions to CIA

1. PROBLEM:

To determine the CIA position on subject proposal of the Department of the Interior.

2. FACTS BEARING ON THE PROBLEM:

a. Existing arrangements for preparation of gazetteers of foreign geographic names have been found to be unsatisfactory to the Department of the Interior.

b. The Office of Geography is the staff component of Interior responsible for undertaking foreign name research and maintaining current foreign name files as a major aspect of its staff function to the inter-departmental Board on Geographic Names (BGN). It is mainly supported in this work by CIA funds (Annex A).

c. Interior proposes that CIA assume the responsibilities and staff functions for foreign geographic names and render staff assistance to the Subcommittee on Foreign Names of BGN (Annex B).

d. Under existing legislation (Annexes C and D) the Board, subject to the approval of the Secretary of the Interior, has the duty of formulating principles, policies, and procedures for domestic and foreign names to serve the interests of the Federal Government and the general public, and for deciding the standard names and their orthography for official use. The Secretary has the duty of providing assistance to the Board and promulgating the name decisions of the Board.

e. Foreign geographic names are promulgated through NIS gazetteers to serve the intelligence requirements of the government and through BGN gazetteers to serve the public interests. The foreign name lists are identical for both gazetteers (Annex E).

3. DISCUSSION:

a. The Department of the Interior considers the research on foreign geographic names and the related name file maintenance and service to be unrelated to its departmental mission and functions. In consequence, it proposes that CIA assume the responsibilities and staff functions for this work since it is mainly supported by CIA funds under the NIS Program. Acceptance of this proposal would involve the administrative transfer to CIA of all or most of the staff of the Office of Geography, Interior; the furnishing of staff support to the BGN Subcommittee on Foreign Names; and the assumption of responsibility for foreign geographic names in the interest of the Federal Government and the general public if the intent of the Act is to be fulfilled.

b. Irrespective of Interior's position, it is difficult to see how CIA could accept as a matter of common concern responsibilities which transcend the intelligence field. It might be argued that the Secretary of the Interior could be prevailed upon to retain his nominal responsibilities under the Act and service through the Board the public requirements and queries on foreign names. Even so, the research staff, presently the Office of Geography, Interior, would have to be called upon to furnish the data to support these requirements. The proposed transfer of these functions to CIA would necessarily involve this Agency in such activities. The NIS gazetteers serve intelligence requirements only. It has been our position to fulfill this responsibility only to the point where a self-supporting BGN public gazetteer program can eventually take over and service both government and public needs. In the interim, however, it is essential to intelligence needs to have the foreign names capability maintained.

c. This leads to the possibility of some other Government department or agency taking on the foreign names responsibility. Since the Army Map Service (AMS) maintains a foreign names activity approximately as large as that presently conducted in the Office of Geography, Interior,

and the other Services have only nominal activities in this field, AMS might be considered by some as an appropriate recipient of this responsibility. Where at all possible, AMS follows BGN foreign name policy and is the largest user of foreign names in its production of large-scale maps of foreign areas. Even if assigned foreign names responsibility, the AMS activity in this field would probably continue to be directed primarily toward fulfillment of the Army's operational requirements, with a consequent lack of assurance that CIA's requests for scheduled support to the NIS gazetteer and editing programs would be obtained or that the rest of the U.S. Government or public would be adequately served as required by the Act -- the latter being in the long-range interests of the gazetteer program.

d. The Department of State, however, is in a position to serve directly the public interests; has a primary responsibility in matters relating to foreign areas; and has long maintained an active interest in the formulation of foreign geographic name policy, particularly in relation to sovereignty claims and actions by foreign governments. Not overburdened by its own operational requirements for foreign names, the Department of State would be in a favorable position to provide support to the NIS gazetteer program, the BGN public gazetteer program, and otherwise to serve both Government and public requirements. CIA could continue to furnish funds for the NIS manuscript and editing work as it now does with Interior.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS:

a. The proposal of the Department of the Interior to transfer to CIA certain responsibilities and staff functions relating to foreign geographic names involves requirements beyond those of the intelligence community.

b. The intelligence requirements for foreign names are presently being fulfilled by the NIS gazetteer program; however, it is the CIA position to rely eventually on the BGN program of public gazetteers as the primary source of foreign geographic names.

c. For the above reasons, it is considered unwise for this Agency to accept Interior's proposal.

d. Of other government agencies, the Department of State appears to have the most suitable environment for assuming the responsibilities and staff functions relating to foreign geographic names.

e. Foreign name requirements of the intelligence community could adequately be satisfied under that arrangement.

5. ACTION RECOMMENDED:

It is recommended that the DCI not accept the proposal of the Department of the Interior, and that another department, most logically the Department of State, be considered in lieu of CIA.

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/s/

Assistant Director  
Basic Intelligence

OTTO E. GUTHE  
Assistant Director  
Research and Reports

ANNEXES:

- (A) Statement of BGN support to the NIS Program.
- (B) Tentative letter (ER S-4143 undated) from Assistant Secretary of the Interior to the Director of Central Intelligence (with enclosures), and subsequent letter dated 29 June 1956.
- (C) Public Law 242 - 80th Congress /Chapter 330 - 1st Session/ /S. 1262\_7 Approved 25 July 1947.
- (D) Senate Report No. 205 of the Committee on Public Lands on Geographic Names Standardization.
- (E) Letter from DD/I to Executive Secretary of BGN, dated 16 March 1955.

CONCURRENCES:

_____	_____
DD/I	Date
_____	_____
General Counsel	Date
_____	_____
DDCI	Date

APPROVED:

_____	_____
DCI	Date

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